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Monday, March 11, 2013 12:16 PM
AppropriationTestimony
Restoration of Funding for Fatherhood Initiative

Subject:

Senators Harp and Bartolomeo, and Representatives Walker, Abercrombie, and Urban:

My name is Kate Ericson, and I am a senior at the University of Connecticut and an intern at Madonna Place. I am in opposition to the Governor's proposed budget cuts that would result in the elimination of funding for all Fatherhood Initiative programs and the Children's Trust Fund Family Empowerment Programs.

During the autumn of 2012, I spent countless hours searching for an internship to complete during the spring semester as part of my human rights minor. I was raised in a small town near Norwich and had spent the better part of high school volunteering at St. Paul's Soup Kitchen, where I first learned about Madonna Place and the excellent work it does. Three years later, as a senior in college, I recalled the praise Madonna Place had received and decided to investigate. The more I learned about the work Madonna Place did, the more determined I became to intern there. While each program offered has innumerable benefits and is greatly needed in the greater Norwich-New London community, the Fatherhood Initiative was what captivated my interest. While many services exist to offer much-needed help to young mothers struggling with the stresses of parenthood, the Fatherhood Initiative stands out as one of the few designed to cater to the unique needs of fathers.

Custody battles, divorce, and unexpected pregnancy all have an effect on the father, who needs a support system just as much as the mother does. It is an unfortunate trend in our society that courts tend to be notoriously "father un-friendly," and the Fatherhood Initiative has worked hard to bring attention to father's rights. The legal sphere specifically offers unique challenges to struggling fathers, many of whom want to play a role in their child's life but are often unsure of how to do so, and the Fatherhood Initiative provides educational and emotional support to young men who find themselves in this position. It is inspiring, as a politics student and future lawyer, to work for an organization that provides legal advocacy for a population that otherwise would have no say.

As someone who has approached human rights from an academic perspective, the disparity between aid for young mothers and young fathers is apparent even at the college level. That is why the work that Fatherhood Initiative does is so important. As a part of my human rights minor, I took a class called "Women and Poverty" – an important subject, to be sure – but there was no corresponding class for fathers struggling with poverty. The Fatherhood Initiative lends a voice to this oft-overlooked group. Eliminating the Fatherhood Initiative would be a grave error. The work that this program does is so great that I have neither the space nor time to explain just how important each and every aspect of the Fatherhood Initiative is. Please consider the needs of young fathers *and* their children, and how important the work that the Fatherhood Initiative does throughout New London county, when discussing the Governor's proposed budget cuts.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kate Ericson

Intern at Madonna Place